Sencha Green Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Sencha, in summary:** Sencha is the foundational Japanese green tea, bright and vegetal with real umami and focus friendly L-theanine; brew it with cooled water, never boiling.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in January 2026.

Sencha is the daily green tea of Japan, accounting for around 80 percent of all tea drunk in Japan and one of the world's most consumed green teas. Made from the steam processed leaves of *Camellia sinensis* grown across the Japanese tea regions (particularly Shizuoka, Kagoshima, and Uji), sencha produces a bright, vegetal, slightly grassy cup with a clean finish and the distinctive "umami" character that defines premium Japanese green tea. It's caffeinated (20 to 35mg per cup), L theanine rich for that awake but easy feeling, and one of the best green teas for daily afternoon drinking.

This guide covers everything about sencha: the production process that distinguishes Japanese green tea from Chinese green tea, the regional variations, the proper brewing approach (much more temperature sensitive than British drinkers expect), the major commercial products, and how to use sencha effectively as part of a daily routine.

The sencha production process

Sencha is produced through a specific process that distinguishes Japanese green tea from Chinese green tea (which is typically pan fired rather than steamed):

1. **Plucking:** the youngest leaves and buds are picked, typically in spring (first flush, called shincha) for premium sencha; later flushes (second, third) for lower grades
2. **Steaming:** the picked leaves are steamed for 15 to 60 seconds to halt enzymatic oxidation. This is the key step that distinguishes Japanese green tea; the steaming preserves the bright green colour and the fresh vegetal character that defines sencha
3. **Cooling:** the steamed leaves are quickly cooled to stop the heating process
4. **Rolling and shaping:** the leaves are rolled into the characteristic needle like shape; this releases internal compounds and produces the final flavour profile
5. **Drying:** the rolled leaves are dried to produce shelf stable tea
6. **Sorting and grading:** leaves are sorted by size and quality grade for retail

The steaming step is what makes sencha sencha. Compared to Chinese green tea (typically pan fired in woks), Japanese sencha has:

- **Brighter green colour:** the steaming preserves chlorophyll better than pan firing
- **More vegetal/grassy character:** the steamed processing produces fresher, more "green" flavours
- **Less toasted character:** no Maillard reaction toasting from pan firing
- **Different aroma profile** more marine/seaweed like notes vs the toasted nut character of Chinese pan fired greens

For the wider green tea family see the green tea overview.

Sencha vs other Japanese green teas

Sencha is one of several Japanese green tea styles, each with distinct characteristics:

Tea	Production	Character
Sencha	Steamed, sun grown	Bright vegetal, balanced umami, classic everyday Japanese green
Gyokuro	Steamed, shaded for 3 weeks before harvest	Premium sweet umami, lower bitterness, highest L theanine, expensive
Matcha	Steamed, shaded, stone ground to powder	Whole leaf consumption; vivid colour; whisked not steeped. See the matcha overview
Bancha	Steamed, later flushes and larger leaves	Less refined sencha, lower caffeine, everyday drinking
Genmaicha	Sencha or bancha mixed with toasted brown rice	Toasted, comforting, distinctive. Teapigs Popcorn Tea is this category
Hojicha	Roasted bancha or sencha	Toasted brown colour, low caffeine, comforting
Kukicha	Made from stems and twigs	Mild, low caffeine, sometimes called "twig tea"

For drinkers building a Japanese green tea collection, sencha is the foundational style; from there, exploring gyokuro (the premium upgrade) and genmaicha (the toasted rice variation) gives real variety in the cup.

The sencha regional variations

Different Japanese tea regions produce sencha with regional character variations:

Shizuoka Prefecture , the largest Japanese tea producing region, accounting for around 40 percent of Japanese tea production. Shizuoka sencha is the everyday Japanese green; balanced character, accessible flavour, broad availability. Most British retail sencha is Shizuoka origin.

Kagoshima Prefecture , the second largest producing region, in southern Japan. Kagoshima sencha has slightly different character due to the warmer climate and different cultivation practices; produces bolder, slightly more astringent cups.

Uji (Kyoto Prefecture) , the most prestigious Japanese tea region, home to the original Japanese tea cultivation. Uji is more associated with premium gyokuro and matcha than with sencha specifically, but Uji

sencha is highly regarded.

Other regions , Mie, Fukuoka, Saitama, and various other prefectures produce sencha with their own regional characters.

For everyday British retail, the regional distinction is largely irrelevant; brand blended sencha provides decent representative character. For drinkers wanting to explore regional variations, teas.co.uk is expanding its Japanese range, and friends like Postcard Teas and Lupicia offer regional sencha options too.

The seasonal flushes

Like many fine teas, sencha quality varies by harvest season:

Shincha (First Flush, late April to early May) , the most prized sencha harvest. The first leaves of the spring season produce the freshest, sweetest sencha with the highest L theanine content. Shincha is a celebratory drink in Japan, particularly anticipated each spring. Typically the most expensive sencha grade.

Second Flush (June to early July) , the dominant commercial harvest. Slightly less premium than shincha but still excellent quality; this is most everyday sencha.

Third Flush (August) , lower grade sencha; bolder character, often used for blending or as bancha rather than premium sencha.

Autumn Flush (September to October) , least premium of the year; mostly used for bulk or blending.

For drinkers wanting to taste premium sencha, shincha (often available in British retail in May June each year) is worth seeking out. For everyday drinking, second flush sencha is the standard.

The sencha flavour profile

Quality sencha has a distinctive flavour profile:

- **Bright vegetal character:** fresh cut grass and seaweed like marine notes
- **Umami depth:** the savoury character that's part of what defines premium Japanese green tea
- **Slight sweetness:** particularly in shincha and premium grades
- **Clean astringency:** modest tannin character that's part of the cup balance
- **Bright pale green to gold cup colour**
- **Aromatic and fresh:** the steamed processing produces a noticeably "alive" aroma

The umami character is what most distinguishes sencha from Chinese green teas. The savoury, broth like depth comes from the L theanine content and is one of the more distinctive features of Japanese green tea. Drinkers used to Western green tea (typically Chinese style with toasted nut character) often need a few cups to develop appreciation for the more vegetal Japanese style.

How to brew sencha properly

Sencha is one of the more temperature sensitive teas and the most common British brewing mistake is using boiling water. Proper sencha brewing:

1. **Use freshly drawn cold water** brought to a boil and then cooled to 70 to 80°C (use a temperature control kettle, or check with a thermometer; cooling time varies with water volume and kettle)
2. **Use 1 teaspoon of leaves** (about 2 to 3g) per 200ml cup
3. **Steep for 1 to 2 minutes:** much shorter than black tea or herbal infusions; oversteeping produces bitterness quickly
4. **Strain or remove leaves promptly**
5. **Drink neat:** no milk, no sweetener; sencha is meant to be appreciated for its natural character
6. **Re brew the leaves:** premium sencha gives 2 to 3 excellent infusions; subsequent infusions use slightly hotter water and shorter brewing

The temperature point cannot be overstated: boiling water on sencha produces a bitter, astringent cup that's nothing like what sencha is supposed to taste like. Most British drinkers who say "I don't like Japanese green tea" have only ever brewed it incorrectly with boiling water. The cool water approach is non negotiable for proper sencha. Sencha wants cooler water; the heat for each other family is listed in the water temperatures guide.

The Japanese tea brewing tradition

The traditional Japanese approach to brewing sencha is more deliberate than typical Western tea brewing:

1. **Boil the water** then pour into a separate pitcher to cool (about 30 to 60 seconds)
2. **Pour the cooled water from the pitcher into the cups:** first to further cool the water and warm the cups (about another 30 seconds)
3. **Pour the cooled water from the cups into the teapot** with the sencha leaves; this gives the right temperature for the actual brewing
4. **Brew for 1 to 2 minutes**
5. **Pour from the teapot back into the warmed cups:** alternating between cups to ensure even strength
6. **Drink in small sips:** appreciating the umami character and aroma

This careful handling of water temperature is what makes Japanese tea brewing distinct from Chinese or British approaches. The careful temperature control produces consistently better cups, and the slow, deliberate method adds a quiet, absorbing element to the drinking. For everyday brewing, simpler approaches work fine; the traditional method is for occasions when the making is part of the pleasure.

Sencha caffeine and L theanine

Sencha caffeine and L theanine content:

- **Caffeine per cup** 20 to 35mg, lower than black tea or coffee, suitable for afternoon drinking without significant sleep impact
- **L theanine content:** high relative to most teas, particularly in shade grown varieties (gyokuro is even higher)

- **Settled focus effect:** the caffeine and L theanine combination produces the distinctive "alert but unhurried" cognitive state without coffee style jitters
- **Multi cup tolerance:** the modest per cup caffeine means 3 to 4 cups across the day stays well within sensible caffeine limits

For drinkers using sencha for afternoon focus, the modest caffeine load combined with the L theanine content makes it one of the better tea options for sustained mental work without sleep disruption. See the ultimate caffeine guide for the family by family caffeine context and the best tea for energy guide for cognitive applications.

What we stock

Browse the green tea range for sencha and other Japanese green teas. The most bought Japanese style green teas on teas.co.uk:

- San Benedetto Matcha Green Tea, 400ml
- Teapigs Popcorn Tea, 15 Tea Bags 37.5g
- Twinings Matcha, 20 Tea Bags 40g
- Loyd Matcha Japanese Green Tea Powder, 40g
- Perfect Ted Ceremonial Grade Matcha, 30g
- Perfect Ted Strawberry Matcha, 75g

For comparisons across the wider green tea landscape, see also: Teapigs, Twinings, Clipper, Pukka.

The verdict on sencha

Sencha is the foundational Japanese green tea and one of the best green teas for daily afternoon drinking. Bright vegetal character, umami depth, modest caffeine, high L theanine and an easy fit with a relaxed, steady way of working make it really useful for anyone drinking tea at a desk.

For drinkers exploring beyond Chinese style green teas, sencha is the natural next step. The umami character is initially unfamiliar to drinkers used to dragonwell or Mao Feng, but develops appreciation quickly with repeated drinking. The proper brewing technique (cooled water, short steep, no sweetener) is essential; anyone who's only had sencha brewed with boiling water hasn't really tasted what the family can offer.

For a serious tea collection, keeping quality Japanese sencha alongside Chinese greens gives real variety in green tea character. The distinct production approaches (steaming vs pan firing) produce noticeably different cups despite both being unoxidised green teas. Sencha is particularly good for afternoon drinking when the lower caffeine and higher L theanine fit the post lunch focus need.

For drinkers in the UK, sourcing quality sencha can be slightly harder than mass market Chinese green tea; teas.co.uk is expanding its Japanese range, and friends like Postcard Teas in London are well worth exploring too. Genmaicha (Teapigs Popcorn Tea is the accessible British retail version) provides a more broadly available introduction to the Japanese green tea family with the comforting toasted rice character.

For the wider context see the green tea overview, the matcha overview, the matcha vs green tea comparison, the green tea vs black tea comparison, the water temperatures guide, the loose leaf brewing

guide, *the caffeine reference*, *and the Teapigs deep dive*.

Related on the wiki: Sencha vs Genmaicha vs Gyokuro: The Japanese Green Ladder.

Source

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

Practical shopping line for this topic: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. There is plenty more in the tea shop, and sencha posts free in the UK above £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Sencha steeps two or three times, so judge it per cup. Loose sencha usually wins, though supermarket green bags sometimes do.

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